

## Who are the Poor?

The facts about the poor are important for decision-making related to education. Because of this, the following information is here supplied to NEA Research Bulletin readers.

In the United States in 1967, there were about 26 million poor persons (about 13 percent of the total population) - 17.8 million (69 percent) white and 8.1 million (31 percent) Negro, or about twice as many white as Negro. But on a percentage basis, 10.3 percent of the total white population and 37.5 percent of the total Negro population were poor.

### What is Poverty?

The number of poor persons is estimated by the Census Bureau based on the definition of poverty developed by the Social Security Administration on the basis of minimum food and other needs of families, family size, number of children, and farm-nonfarm residence. For example, for a nonfarm family of four, the poverty threshold was a money income of \$3,060 in 1959 and \$3,335 in 1967.

### Where Do the Poor Live?

As shown in Table 1, there are poor people living in both the central city and the suburban parts of metropolitan areas and in locations outside these metropolitan areas. In 1967, about 13.2 million poor persons were living in metropolitan areas, and nearly as many (12.9 million) living outside the Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas.

Within the metropolitan areas nearly 5 million were living in suburban locations and 8.3 million were living in central cities. There were about 700,000 more poor people in the large metropolitan areas (4.5 million) than in the small (3.8 million).

Not only in national total, but also in every type of area (national aggregates shown in Table 1), the poor whites outnumbered the poor Negroes. On the other hand, in all areas reported, much larger percentages of the Negro population than of the white population were poor. More than half (55 percent) of the Negro population living outside metropolitan areas were poor while only 3 in 10 living in the metropolitan areas were poor.

Also shown in Table 1 is that during the eight years from 1959 to 1967, although the total population increased, the numbers of white and Negro poor decreased, and the percentages of each race who were poor and living in each type of residential area also decreased.

### Metropolitan Areas vs. Other Locations

In 1967 about half (51 percent) of the poor people lived in metropolitan areas, and they were about equally divided between the large metropolitan areas (1,000,000 or more population) and the small (under 1,000,000). Outside these metropolitan areas, six times as many poor people were classified as nonfarm as farm (42 percent and 7 percent).

Just under half the poor whites (49 percent) but more than half the poor Negroes (55 percent) lived in metropolitan areas - 24 percent of the whites and 30 percent of the Negroes in the large SMSA's and 25 percent of whites and Negroes in the small SMSA's.

### Central City vs. Suburbs

The poor Negroes in metropolitan areas tend to be concentrated in the central cities - 44 percent of all poor Negroes vs. 26 percent of all poor whites. On the other hand, 11 percent of the poor Negroes vs. 22 percent of the poor whites lived in the SMSA suburbs in 1967. Reference to Table 1 shows, however,

that regardless of percentages, the number of poor whites in the central cities (as a whole) was more than one-third greater than the number of poor Negroes.

A widely held belief is that metropolitan poverty is confined to the central cities. The statistics on poverty, however, show that for every 1.6 poor persons living in the central cities there was a poor person in the suburban fringe. For every 1.2 poor whites in the central cities there was a poor white in suburbia, and for every 3.4 poor Negroes in central cities there was a poor Negro in suburbia.

From 1959 to 1967, the proportion of the poor living in central cities as a whole increased for both whites and Negroes. While the proportion of both poor whites and poor Negroes in the central cities and suburbs of small SMSA's decreased slightly during the eight-year period, the proportions of both poor whites and poor Negroes in the large SMSA's increased - the largest increase for the poor whites was from 8 percent to 11 percent in the suburbs, and for the poor Negroes, from 19 percent to 26 percent in the central cities.

#### Poor Families

In 1967, there were 2.6 million poor families in metropolitan areas, a decrease from 3.6 million in 1959 - 1.6 million in the central cities and 1.0 million in the suburbs. About 58 percent of the poor families in the central cities were white, and 42 percent were Negro; in the suburbs 83 percent were white and 16 percent were Negro.

In the central cities in 1967, about the same proportions of poor families were headed by men under 65 years of age (39 percent) as were headed by women under 65 (38 percent). But by race the proportions were 25 percent white and 14 percent Negro headed by men, and 15 percent white and 23 percent Negro headed by women. In the suburbs, about 42 percent of the poor families were headed by men under 65 (35 percent white and 6 percent Negro) and 31 percent of the poor families were headed by women under 65 (24 percent white and 7 percent Negro).

During the 8 year period, 1959 to 1967, the changes in distribution of poor families in standard metropolitan areas were these: a small increase in the proportion of families headed by persons 65 years of age and older, a large increase in the proportion headed by women under 65 (in central cities mostly among Negroes), a decline in the proportion headed by men under 65, both white and Negro.

In 1968, about one-fourth of the families in the central cities of SMSA's of 250,000 or more lived in poverty areas (neighborhoods which in 1960 contained large concentrations of poor families), a decline of 21 percent from 1960 - for white families, a decrease of 35 percent, and for Negro families, a decrease of 10 percent.

#### Children in Poverty

In his study of the urban poor, Downs used available data for 1966. By making certain basic assumptions, he was able to produce information on children living in poverty, summarized in the paragraphs below:

In 1966, the 6.341 million poor children under 18 in metropolitan areas constituted 15.9 percent of the children in those areas and 41.7 percent of all poor persons there. Also, the percent of children who were poor was more than twice as high in the central cities as in the suburbs, and three times as high among nonwhites as among whites. However, the proportion of children who were poor was significantly lower in metropolitan areas than in other parts of the nation.

The more children there were in a family, the larger was the percentage of families that are classified as poor. For example,

10.2 percent of all families with two children were poor, but 42.1 percent of those with 6 or more children were poor.

In 1959, 26.1 percent of all children under 18 in the nation were poor; in 1966, 17.9 percent, a decline in the percentage of almost one-third. Among whites, the decline was from 20.1 percent to 12.3 percent; among nonwhites, from 63.8 percent to 50.4 percent.

#### Source of Data

The data presented in the major portion of this article were based on a recent release of the U.S. Bureau of the Census, Trends in Social and Economic Conditions in Metropolitan Areas (Series P-23, No. 27). This statistical report presents data on changes from 1960 to 1968 in population, family composition, education, employment, and income, and on changes from 1959 to 1967 in poverty in the central cities and suburban rings of the 212 standard metropolitan statistical areas (SMSA's).

#### Some Further References

##### Definition of Poverty

Orshansky, Mollie. "Counting the Poor: Another Look at the Poverty Profile." Social Security Bulletin 28: 3-29; Jan., 1965.

Orshansky, Mollie. "Who's Who Among the Poor: A demographic View of Poverty." Social Security Bulletin 28: 3-32; July 1965.

##### Perspectives on Poverty

The February 1969 issue of the Monthly Labor Review contains five articles grouped under this heading, as follows:

Willacy, Hazel M. "Men in Poverty Neighborhoods: A Status Report." Pages 23-27.

Newman, Dorothy K. "Changing Attitudes About the Poor." Pages 32-36.

Orshansky, Mollie. "How Poverty is Measured." Pages 37-41.

Herzog, Elizabeth. "Facts and Fictions about the Poor." Pages 42-49.

Aaron, Henry J. "Income Transfer Programs." Pages 50-54.

Chandler, John H. "An International Comparison." Pages 55-62.

##### Statistics

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